

the best of the 1990's
by *matthew mackay*

**Beastie Boys
Hello Nasty**

This album is so musically lush and dense it's almost symphonic. The 90s answer to Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, Hello Nasty proves that maybe, just maybe, "the kids are alright."

**Captain Beefheart
Grow Fins**

This new box set documents one of the best minds and voices in music. Now a painter, this box is unfortunately as close as many will get to a Beefheart concert. In the beginning, Beefheart was Zappa's guide, and this box shows Zappa's debt to "the man from Venus."

**Miles Davis
On the Corner**

Jazz lovers universally hate this album, but the work has been re-evaluated in the 90s. Miles invented hip hop-in 1972, and you can hear echoes of this in much of today's tunes. Unfortunately, the Columbia CD is a poor remaster. Wait for the upcoming Mobile Fidelity Gold CD version, due out next year. Best \$50 bucks you'll ever spend.

**Steve Earle
El Corozon**

A dried out Steve Earle wins the war against banal cross over country music with this knock out punch. This album is what Dylan's Blood on the Tracks was to songwriters in the 70's. It either inspired you to work harder, or quit altogether.

**R.L. Burnside
Come On In**

This remix of hard core Chicago blues by rap producers should have been a travesty, but it works. This new perspective on the blues will bring a new audience to a great American art form.

**Ry Cooder
Afro Cuban All Stars**

The best Cuban musicians you never heard tastefully (and emphatically) produced by Ry Cooder. Makes you ashamed you bought Jimmy Buffet albums in the 80s. Have a Bolivar and build a voodoo shire to Ricky Ricardo.

**Steve Forbert
Here's Your Pizza**
Crippled by "the New Dylan" label, and muzzled by lawsuits in the 80s, Forbert hopped on a bus and played juke joints for a decade. There are better musicians, but none as exuberant and playful as Forbert in front of the fans. This live set captures him at his best.

**Van Morrison
The Healing Game**
Hope for us all. You can get older, fatter, balder-and better. Van finally sheds his new age slumming and returns to his alcoholic Christian soul roots. Work so personal you almost feel like a voyeur.

**The Ramones
We're Outa Here**
After thirty years and a billion sets of two minute tunes, the Ramones bow out gracefully with a star studded cast of guest performers. Still the best group to ever dodge beer bottles at CBGBs.

**XTC
Apple Venus**
Andy Partridge reinvents himself as the quintessential Englishman, self effacing and pantheistic. The most druid album of the decade, a few listens of this will have you hugging rocks and sacrificing pets.

**Patti Smith
Peace and Noise**
Older, wiser, sadder, better. America's best poet, and logical heir to Ginsberg and Kerouac. One of the few of us who tragedy makes stronger. And the hairy armpits are a bonus! I fell in love with her when she opened for the long forgotten Blondie in 1975.

**Brian Wilson
I Just Wasn't Made For These Times**
Updated "teenage symphonies to God", with help from high priest Don Was. A mix of new and older Beach Boys tunes updated for the 90s, Wilson proves he never went away. The bad news is the CD is barely 30 minutes long.

**Tom Waits
Beautiful Maladies**
This greatest hits collection is a musical time capsule. In a tad over an hour, Waits gives the listener the history of American music from Steven Foster to John Cage.

**Velvet Underground
Peel Slowly and See**
This 5CD box sets gives us practically every note recorded by the original Velvets, and lets collectors retire their foggy bootlegs. Lets a new audience see where today's bands stole their ideas.

**Frank Zappa
200 Motels**
After years of legal wrangling, Ryko finally pried this soundtrack from the corporate lawyer's clammy hands. We can retire our treasured, ravaged vinyl copies and hear one of the strongest incarnations of the Mothers of Invention. Flo and Eddie never sounded better, and Zappa was at his pop music best in 1971.

**Alexander Spence
Oar**
Conceived and written while a resident of Bellevue Hospital, Oar sums up the psychedelic 60s. The worst selling album in Columbia history, most of us had to do with a fifth generation bootleg. This is the only album you'd need to explain the 60s to an alien (or someone who insists on wearing a hat backwards). Spence died penniless in a trailer park last April, and Oar, remastered by Sundazed Records this year and packaged with outtakes and alternates, is the best tombstone he could have.

**Oasis
Be Here Now**
If being the Beatles means cranking out meaty power pop, well, these guys are the Beatles. If they can avoid drug-induced comas, the Gallaghers will have one of the strongest catalogues of the next decade.

**Robert Earle Keene
Walking Distance**
Picture Lyle Lovett without the pretension, and Merle Haggard without a drinking problem, and you have the best folk singer to come out of Texas since Townes Van Zandt died. Decades playing behind chicken wire in honky tonks have purified his vision.

**Gram Parsons and the
Grievous Angels Live**
A 1996 remix of the classic 1973 concert by the man who single handedly bridged country and rock. The rare gold CD is sonically superior to the muddled 1982 pressing and worth searching out. A cornerstone album by a man who was a cornerstone.

**Elvis Presley
The Complete 50s Masters**
No one will ever be this brilliant and intense. Elvis was the foundation of rock and roll. It doesn't matter that the king died in exile. This was where it started, and we all should be eternally thankful for those first five years. No artist will ever equal those sessions.

